

Information about careers in sociology is available from:  
 American Sociological Association, 1307 New York Ave. NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005. Internet: <http://www.asanet.org>

For information about careers in demography, contact:  
 Population Association of America, 721 Ellsworth Dr., Suite 303, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Internet: <http://www.popassoc.org>

## Social and Recreation Workers

### Human Service Workers and Assistants

(O\*NET 27308)

#### Significant Points

- Human service worker and assistant occupations are projected to be among the fastest growing.
- Job opportunities should be excellent, particularly for applicants with appropriate postsecondary education, but pay is low.

#### Nature of the Work

Human service workers and assistants is a generic term for people with various job titles, including social service assistant, case management aide, social work assistant, community support worker, alcohol or drug abuse counselor, mental health aide, community outreach worker, life skill counselor, and gerontology aide. They usually work under the direction of professionals from a variety of fields, such as nursing, psychiatry, psychology, rehabilitative or physical therapy, or social work. The amount of responsibility and supervision they are given varies a great deal. Some have little direct supervision; others work under close direction.

Human service workers and assistants provide direct and indirect client services. They assess clients' needs, establish their eligibility for benefits and services, and help clients obtain them. They examine financial documents such as rent receipts and tax returns to determine whether the client is eligible for food stamps, Medicaid, welfare, and other human service programs. They also arrange for transportation and escorts, if necessary, and provide emotional support. Human service workers and assistants monitor and keep case records on clients and report progress to supervisors and case managers. Human service workers and assistants also may transport or accompany clients to group meal sites, adult daycare centers, or doctors' offices. They may telephone or visit clients' homes to make sure services are being received, or to help resolve disagreements, such as those between tenants and landlords. They also may help clients complete insurance or medical forms, as well as applications for financial assistance. Additionally, social and human service workers and assistants may assist others with daily living needs.

Human service workers and assistants play a variety of roles in a community. They may organize and lead group activities, assist clients in need of counseling or crisis intervention, or administer a food bank or emergency fuel program. In halfway houses, group homes, and government-supported housing programs, they assist adults who need supervision with personal hygiene and daily living skills. They review clients' records, ensure that they take correct doses of medication, talk with family members, and confer with medical personnel and other care givers to gain better insight into clients' backgrounds and needs. Human service workers and assistants also provide emotional support and help clients become involved in their own well being, in community recreation programs, and in other activities.

In psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation programs, and outpatient clinics, human service workers and assistants work with professional

care providers, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers to help clients master everyday living skills, to teach them how to communicate more effectively, and to get along better with others. They support the client's participation in a treatment plan, such as individual or group counseling or occupational therapy.

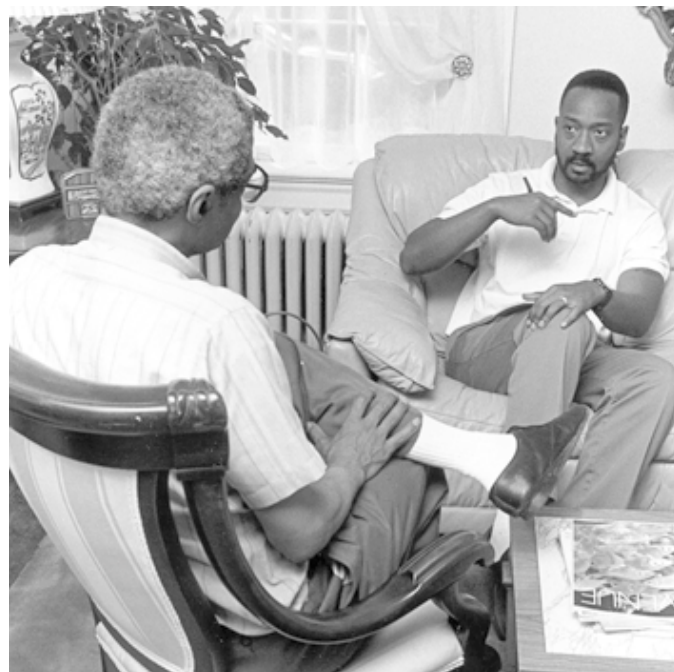
#### Working Conditions

Working conditions of human service workers and assistants vary. Some work in offices, clinics, and hospitals, while others work in group homes, shelters, sheltered workshops, and day programs. Many spend their time in the field visiting clients. Most work a 40-hour week, although some work in the evening and on weekends.

The work, while satisfying, can be emotionally draining. Understaffing and relatively low pay may add to the pressure. Turnover is reported to be high, especially among workers without academic preparation for this field.

#### Employment

Human service workers and assistants held about 268,000 jobs in 1998. Almost half worked in private social or human services agencies, offering a variety of services, including adult daycare, group meals, crisis intervention, counseling, and job training. Many human service workers and assistants supervised residents of group homes and halfway houses. About one-third were employed by State and local governments, primarily in public welfare agencies and facilities for mentally disabled and developmentally challenged individuals. Human service workers and assistants also held jobs in clinics, detoxification units, community mental health centers, psychiatric hospitals, day treatment programs, and sheltered workshops.



*Human service workers and assistants assess clients' needs and help them obtain appropriate benefits and services.*

**Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Although a bachelor’s degree usually is not required for this occupation, employers increasingly are seeking individuals with relevant work experience or education beyond high school. Certificates or associate degrees in subjects such as social work, human services, or one of the social or behavioral sciences meet most employers’ requirements.

Human services programs have a core curriculum that trains students to observe patients and record information, conduct patient interviews, implement treatment plans, employ problem-solving techniques, handle crisis intervention matters, and use proper case management and referral procedures. General education courses in liberal arts, sciences, and the humanities also are part of the curriculum. Many degree programs require completion of a supervised internship.

Educational attainment often influences the kind of work an employee may be assigned and the degree of responsibility that may be entrusted to them. For example, workers with no more than a high school education are likely to receive extensive on-the-job training to work in direct-care services, while employees with a college degree might be assigned to do supportive counseling, coordinate program activities, or manage a group home. Human service workers and assistants with proven leadership ability, either from previous experience or as a volunteer in the field, often receive greater autonomy in their work. Regardless of the academic or work background of employees, most employers provide some form of in-service training, such as seminars and workshops, to their employees.

Hiring requirements in group homes tend to be more stringent than in other settings. For example, employers may require employees to have a valid driver’s license or to submit to a criminal background investigation.

Employers try to select applicants who have effective communication skills, a strong sense of responsibility, and the ability to manage time effectively. Many human services jobs involve direct contact with people who are vulnerable to exploitation or mistreatment; therefore, patience, understanding, and a strong desire to help others, are highly valued characteristics.

Formal education almost always is necessary for advancement. In general, advancement requires a bachelor’s or master’s degree in counseling, rehabilitation, social work, human services management, or a related field.

**Job Outlook**

Opportunities for human service workers and assistants are expected to be excellent, particularly for applicants with appropriate postsecondary education. The number of human service workers and assistants is projected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations between 1998 and 2008—ranking among the most rapidly growing occupations. The need to replace workers who move into new positions due to advancement, retirement, or for other reasons will create many additional job opportunities. This occupation, however, is not attractive to everyone. It can be draining emotionally and the pay is relatively low. Qualified applicants should have little difficulty finding employment.

Faced with rapid growth in the demand for social and human services, employers are developing new strategies for delivering and funding services. Many employers increasingly will rely on human service workers and assistants to undertake greater responsibility in delivering services to clients.

Opportunities are expected to be best in job training programs, residential care facilities, and private social service agencies, which include such services as adult daycare and meal delivery programs. Demand for these services will expand with the growing number of elderly, who are more likely to need services. In addition, social and human service workers and assistants will continue to be needed to provide services to pregnant teenagers, the homeless,

the mentally disabled and developmentally challenged, and those with substance-abuse problems.

Job training programs are expected to require additional human service workers and assistants. As social welfare policies shift focus from benefit-based programs to work-based initiatives, there will be an increased demand for people to teach job skills to the people who are new to or re-entering the workforce. Additionally, streamlined and downsized businesses create increased demand for persons with job retraining expertise. Human service workers and assistants will help companies to cope with new modes of conducting business and employees to master new job skills.

Residential care establishments should face increased pressures to respond to the needs of the chronically and mentally ill. Many of these patients have been deinstitutionalized and lack the knowledge or the ability to care for themselves. Also, more community-based programs, supported independent living sites, and group residences are expected to be established to house and assist the homeless, and the chronically, and mentally, ill. As a result, demand for human service workers and assistants will increase.

The number of jobs for human service workers and assistants will grow more rapidly than overall employment in State and local governments. State and local governments employ many of their human service workers and assistants in corrections and public assistance departments. Although employment in corrections departments is growing, employment of social and human service workers and assistants is not expected to grow as rapidly as employment in other corrections jobs, such as guards or corrections officers. Public assistance programs have been employing more human service workers and assistants in an attempt to employ fewer social workers, who are more educated, thus more highly paid.

**Earnings**

Median annual earnings of human service workers and assistants were \$21,360 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,620 and \$27,070. The top 10 percent earned more than \$33,840, while the lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,540.

Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of human service workers and assistants in 1997 were:

State government, except education and hospitals .....	\$25,600
Local government, except education and hospitals .....	23,500
Hospitals .....	21,200
Health and allied services, not elsewhere classified .....	20,600
Social services, not elsewhere classified .....	20,200

**Related Occupations**

Workers in other occupations that require skills similar to those of human service workers and assistants include social workers, religious workers, residential counselors, child-care workers, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapy assistants, psychiatric aides, and activity leaders.

**Sources of Additional Information**

Information on academic programs in human services may be found in most directories of 2- and 4-year colleges, available at libraries or career counseling centers.

For information on programs and careers in human services, contact:

- ☛ National Organization for Human Service Education, Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, NJ 07738.
- ☛ Council for Standards in Human Services Education, Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill, MA 01830.

Information on job openings may be available from State employment service offices or directly from city, county, or State departments of health, mental health and mental retardation, and human resources.